Translation Tips for Amateur Translators

Ideally, professional translators with high fluency in both languages should translate documents. When it is not feasible to hire a qualified professional, here are some tips to translate using Microsoft Word and a web-based computer translator, such as http://babelfish.altavista.com/ or http://www.freetranslation.com/

Step 1: Copy and Paste. *Anyone can do this step, even if they do not speak the foreign language.*

- Open a new, blank document in Microsoft Word. Go to Tools, then Language, then Set Language, and select the foreign language. This will enable you to use spell check and grammar check in that language.
- Copy and paste each paragraph from your English Microsoft Word document into the computer translator window. Then copy and paste the translated output into your foreign language Microsoft Word document.
- Computer translators do not recognize paragraph breaks, lists or headers. They connect headers or list items to each other to make sentences. While copying and pasting, prevent these problems by always copying only until the next paragraph break. This means you will copy each paragraph header alone and each list item alone.
- The text should copy and paste easily between the webpage and Microsoft Word. However, some old versions of Netscape Navigator internet browser do not copy and paste well. If copy and paste is not working properly, try using a more current version of Netscape Navigator or use Internet Explorer instead. (I have not tried this with other web browsers, so I do not know how well they work.)

Step 2: Initial Revision. *A person who is fluent in the foreign language should complete this step.*

- Computer translator output always has many errors. Computer translators cannot distinguish between homonyms (e.g., whether "bark" refers to a dog sound or a part of a tree), do not understand idioms (e.g., "a close shave") and do not rearrange words exactly as required by grammar of different languages.
- First use Microsoft Word spell check and grammar check to correct errors. However, as with English documents, spell check and grammar check will not catch all errors, so you must also have a human being review it.
- The computer translator will leave a word in English surrounded by foreign language text when it does not recognize an English word, so do not assume that the other language is the same just because the computer translator left it the same.
- Check words that may have been mistranslated using a foreign language/English dictionary. Some good Spanish online dictionaries are at http://www.wordreference.com/es/en/translation.asp and http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dict_en_es/. Also, newer versions of Microsoft Word have a foreign language/English dictionary. To use it, select Tools, then Language, and then Translate. A window will come up on the side of the screen that you can use to look up words.
- Remember that most organizations have official foreign language names. Check with the organization and use the official foreign language name, not the one created by a computer translator.
- When typing Spanish words, many vowels require accents (ó) and many n's require tildes (ñ). In Spanish, question marks and exclamation points are upside down at the beginning of the sentence (¿) in addition to being at the end of sentences. Computer translator output will already have these characters, but as you are editing your document, you will need to type some characters yourself. To create an accent over a vowel, first press the control and the accent keys simultaneously, and then type the vowel. To type the tilde, first press the control, shift and tilde keys simultaneously, then type the n. To create upside down punctuation marks, press control, alt, shift and the punctuation mark key simultaneously.

Step 3: Final Review. *A native speaker of the foreign language should complete this step.*

- Ask a native speaker to make sure the document is understandable, that the words and grammar are correct, and it sounds natural in the foreign language.
- Discuss the intent of your document with the native speaker and make sure that the translation does not change the meaning of the document.
- It is even better if you can get more than one native speaker from the same region and reading level as your target audience to review the document.